



South Africa: Access to Sanitation in Informal Settlements

The Social Justice Coalition (SJC) is a coalition of civil society organisations in the informal settlement of Khayelitsha in Cape Town. Soon after it was formed in 2008, SJC heard reports from many residents that the lack of adequate toilet facilities resulted in people being assaulted, raped, and murdered when relieving themselves. There were also several other reported problems related to sanitation. SJC estimated that at least 500,000 residents of informal settlements in Cape Town did not have access to adequate sanitation.

In 2010 SJC therefore launched the Clean and Safe Sanitation Campaign. The campaign aimed to ensure that the City Council properly maintains existing toilets and also provide additional clean and safe sanitation facilities in informal settlements.

SJC's campaign had several concrete achievements. First, the City introduced a janitorial service for regular maintenance of flush toilets and standpipes. This service also provided jobs for 500 unemployed people. The City said they would fund this service every year.

Second, the City took its maintenance responsibilities more seriously. For example, in the month of November 2011 it repaired 256 toilets in Khayelitsha.

Third, SJC found that the City spent 11 percent of its operational budget on contracting private companies to perform functions such as servicing chemical toilets. However, the companies did not clean the toilets as often as agreed, and the City did not monitor them properly. After repeated requests, SJC was given copies of the agreements with the private service providers. Legislation says that these agreements should be on municipal websites, but SJC only received them after media advocacy and a threat of legal action. SJC used the agreements to show that the providers were not complying with all requirements.

Fourth, the SJC convinced the City to tag each toilet with its GPS coordinates to enable repair teams to find them easily when problems were reported. Tagging is necessary because many streets in Khayelitsha do not have formal names and numbers.

Fifth, the City agreed to install free phones which residents can use to report problems directly to the Water and Sanitation Technical Operations Centre.

The SJC used many strategies to achieve these gains. These include research, use of legal arguments, media publicity targeting both poor and wealthier communities, and protest. The SJC did some budget work, but it was not able to find reliable information on how much the City spends on Khayelitsha or even on all informal settlements combined.

The SJC used protest more in the first year of the campaign than in later years because SJC's relationship with the City was very strained in the first year. For two of the protests members of the SJC queued at toilets in public places where they could be seen by many middle class people. They did this to shock middle class people and as a symbol of the many South Africans who are still waiting for access to clean and safe sanitation facilities.

Two aspects of SJC's approach helped to create a better relationship with the City. Firstly, SJC is not aligned with any political party. Secondly, SJC accepts that change will need to be incremental – that the City will not be able to address all problems immediately and fully.

The City listens to the SJC because of its large community-based membership as well as its partnerships with other sections of civil society. SJC's partners range from religious leaders to professionals and organisations that have skills they can use to assist SJC in putting forward its arguments and demands.